

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY MADRID

C O N F I D E N T I A L USNATO 6894

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PGOV SP

SUBJ: NEW SPANISH CABINET

REF: A) STATE 293884 B) MADRID 8708

1. AT DECEMBER 16 NATO POLADS MEETING, US REP DREW ON REFTELS IN OUTLINING DEPARTMENT'S VIEW THAT NEW SPANISH CABINET REPRESENTS A STEP FORWARD IN SPANISH POLITICAL PROCESS.

2. UK REP (MARGETSON) CIRCULATED FOLLOWING BRITISH ANALYSIS OF NEW GOVERNMENT WHICH, HE NOTED, IS SIMILAR TO US ASSESSMENT.

BEGIN TEXT:

1. BESIDES ARIAS HIMSELF ONLY THREE MINISTERS FROM THE OLD GOVERNMENT REMAIN: PITA DA VEIGA (NAVY), VALDES (PUBLIC WORKS) SOLIS (MOVED FROM THE MOVEMENT TO LABOUR). STRUCTURAL CHANGES ARE THE NEW POST OF VICE PRESIDENT FOR DEFENCE, THE ABOLITION OF THE POST OF MINISTER FOR PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, THE DEMOTION OF LABOUR FROM A VICE-PRESIDENCY, AND THE SPECIFIC ATTRIBUTION OF GENERAL SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES TO ALL THREE VICE PRESIDENTS
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(DEFENCE, INTERNAL, ECONOMIC).

3. ARIAS APART, EIGHT OUT OF THE FIFTEEN CIVILIAN MINISTERS IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT CAN LOOSELY BE DESCRIBED AS CENTRIST (

INTERIOR, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, JUSTICE, EDUCATION, AGRICULTURE, COMMERCE, INFORMATION AND PRESIDENCY). FOUR MORE ARE A POLITICAL TECHNOCRATS (FINANCE, PUBLIC WORKS, INDUSTRY, HOUSING). THERE ARE ONLY THREE MOVIMIENTO FALANGISTS (LABOUR, SYNDICAL RELATIONS AND MOVEMENT). OF THESE SYNDICAL RELATIONS (THE PRESENT GOVERNOR OF BARCELONA) IS DISTINCTLY PROGRESSIVE BY MOVIMIENTO STANDARDS.

3. OF THE FOUR SERVICE MINISTERS, THE DEFENCE VICE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN PROFESSIONALLY CLOSE TO GENERAL DIEZ ALEGRIA AND SOME SAY HE HIDES PROGRESSIVE VIEWS UNDER HIS QUIET PROFESSIONAL EXTERIOR. HIS APPOINTMENT MAY WELL FORESHADOW THE EMERGENCE OF A UNIFIED MINISTRY OF DEFENCE. THE NEW ARMY AND AIR FORCE MINISTERS ARE THOUGHT TO BE GOOD PROFESSIONALS IF CHARACTERISTICALLY CONSERVATIVE. THE NAVY MINISTER IS UNCHANGED, HE IS REGARDED AS A REACTIONARY, BUT PROFESSIONALLY HE HAS BEEN MORE COMPETENT AND POPULAR THAN HIS TWO FORMER COLLEAGUES.

4. THE NEW CABINET CANNOT BE DESCRIBED AS FORESHADOWING AN ERA OF RADICAL CHANGE. BUT THE TURNOVER HAS BEEN GREATER THAN GENERALLY EXPECTED AND A NUMBER OF KEY MINISTRIES HAVE GONE TO FIGURES WHO HAVE IN VARYING DEGREES AND FOR VARYING PERIODS BEEN IN OPEN OPPOSITION TO THE FRANCO REGIME. THE BALANCE OF THE CIVILIAN CABINET HAS SHIFTED SHARPLY AWAY FROM THE TRADITIONAL RIGHT. THE INCREASED SERVICE REPRESENTATION MAY BE INTENDED TO GO SOME WAY TO REASSURE THE ARMED FORCES.

5. FRAGA HAS COME OUT OF THE HORSE-TRADING WELL. EDUCATION AND INFORMATION ARE HIS CLOSE FRIENDS, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, COMMERCE AND PRESIDENCY ARE POLITICAL ALLIES, JUSTICE AND AGRICULTURE ARE SYMPATHISERS, AND IN ANY CONFLICT WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT THE CIVILIAN PROFESSIONALS CAN BE EXPECTED TO BE ON THE SIDE OF PROGRESS. MOST PEOPLE ASSUME THAT THE PRESENT CABINET IS A GOVERNMENT OF TRANSITION. DURING THE NEXT SIX MONTHS OR SO FRAGA HAS THE CHANCE TO PROVE THAT HE CAN HANDLE SPAIN'S EVOLUTION TOWARDS DEMOCRACY. IF HE SUCCEEDS HE WILL BE THE OBVIOUS MAN TO TAKE OVER FROM ARIAS. IF HE FAILS HE MAY WELL FIND HIMSELF CONFIDENTIAL

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FINISHED POLITICALLY. THERE WILL BE MANY PEOPLE HERE WISHING HIM TO FAIL WHETHER ON POLITICAL OR PERSONAL GROUNDS. HE WILL NEED LUCK AS WELL AS JUDGMENT. HIS JOB IS AN EXCEPTIONALLY DIFFICULT ONE.

6. IN THE SHORTER TERM AT LEAST IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO WRITE OFF ARIAS. WITH THE NEW TEAM, HOWEVER AMORPHOUS, HE AND THE KING MAY BE ABLE TO GET SOME GENUINE REFORM GOING.

END TEXT. BRUCE

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